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ENG: 201

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Title

The majority of people on earth live in a very visual world. The basic things that we look at are easily deciphered and we have a description of what we are seeing in a fraction of a second. On the other hand, some things we view the description that comes into our mind in an instance isn’t enough information to truly have a meaning of the visual. This is where pictorial rhetoric begins. When somebody sees a photograph they instantly know that they are looking at, a photograph, but it takes some time for the viewer to truly translate a meaning of the image. In order for a person to have a meaning after the initial viewing they need to critically analyze the image to see what it is that the image is trying to communicate. As a photographer it can be a challenge to communicate my idea through images in a way that most people can apprehend what it is I’m trying to display through a picture. I know what it is that I’m trying to display, but the intended message is not always the same as the message received. It is always very interesting to have an image and then see the different responses that you get from different individuals looking at the same image. People are constantly viewing images so it is very important that the creators of images realize that the work they are creating can be interpreted in many different ways.

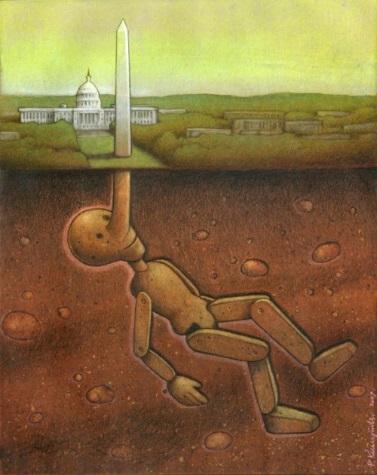
**Background and secondary information**

To start off we need to look at the history of visual rhetoric. Prior to 1970 the only rhetoric that was said to exist was verbal rhetoric, and verbal was the only rhetoric that had been studied. In 1970 at the national conference of rhetoric a recommendation produced by the conference participants called for an expansion of the study of rhetoric “to include subjects which not traditionally fallen within the critic’s purview; the non-discursive as well as the discursive, the nonverbal as well as the verbal” (Foss 141) the participants went on to suggest that a rhetorical respective may be applied to any human act, process, product, or behavior. Visual rhetoric has actually always been around, it was just at this point that it was acknowledged to be a real thing by the academic community.

Now that we have a background of how visual rhetoric became thing, we’ll dig into what visual rhetoric actually is. A nice simple definition according to the writing center at Duke University sates that “visual literacy refers to the ability to “read” an image, much like the way we “read” language”. Curtis Newbold says that “Visualrhetoric, in a nutshell, refers to how we are persuaded by the things we see.”

**Primary research, methods and findings**

I conducted my own research to try to find out if people can actually understand the desired meaning of an image that the creator intended. I wanted to know if people could take two completely unrelated images and find connections between the two images. I also went out to see if the same image can receive a number of different interpretations. In the survey I asked a series of questions that had to do with one’s own ability to interpret the meaning of images. To start off I got some basic demographical data, age, gender, and home town. Following those questions I asked how they would rate their personal ability to critically analyze images on a scale of excellent to terrible. Then I showed the pictures below.





With the Washington monument picture I asked, in your opinion what is this picture trying to say? For the most part people were able to make a connection between the figure underground which represents Pinocchio the lying puppet and his nose is the Washington monument which then people were able to draw a conclusion that means that the government is full of lies, or that our government is built on a foundation of lies. Either of which seem like reasonable interpretations.

The next question had to do with the lake in the mountains. This really was a simple question but some people tended to overthink it therefore voiding their response. I asked, how does the image of this lake make you feel? By far the most common response to this was peaceful, but among others similar included serene, relaxing, and pristine. Some other interesting responses included multiple accounts of nostalgia, and reminding people of home, or missing a location they once visited.

The next question was, what emotions/topics come to mind after viewing the following image? Which is the black and white picture of the person sitting in the dark against a wall alone. Common answers included sadness, loneliness, and depression. Depression was the clear winner, for the most common answer. Other answers included addiction, suicidal, or homeless. The final question had to do with both the decapitated teddy bear and the dark alone image; where I asked if the two images discussed similar situations. For the most part people firstly said no but then would continue to say that they suppose the two images could possibly have the same message, but that they don’t have to. People came to the conclusion that the two images separate from each other do not communicate the same thing, but when you put them side by side they could create a stronger message together then they could have alone.

I asked if they thought that it is important that people can understand/interpret visual images using a scale of five from very important to not important. Not a single person said that it isn’t important, in fact the overwhelming majority stated that being able to interpret visual images is either very important or one step below.

I ended the survey with the question, do you think that a picture is actually worth a thousand words? The general consensus is that images can be very powerful and that a lot can be said in one image. There was a valid argument against pictures value of communication. Some people said that words are just as powerful if they are put into the correct sequence of words. The best example somebody gave was Martin Luther’s “I Have a Dream Speech” they continued to say that his speech was more than a thousand words.

There was a link that I found between ones age and their ability to critically analyze images. For the most part the older somebody one the better they rated themselves and after going through their responses I too would also agree that on average the older a respondent got the better their answers became. I found that often the younger respondents often over thought their answers to a far-fetched, how did you come up with that answer.

**Discussion**

Works Cited

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#### 1. Informed Consent:  Pictorial Rhetoric sleig1ta@cmich.edu  Project Description: Pictorial rhetoric is an idea that is becoming much more common among specific cohorts of people, but is something all people really need to be able to have a firm grasp on. With the manipulation of almost all imagery that is seen out and about, it is important to be able to read what it is the image is trying to communicate. Procedure and Risks:  I would like to use the information from this survey in my English 201 paper.  No personal identifiers will be used to ensure your anonymity. Please feel free to say as much or as little as you want.  You can decide not to answer any question or to stop the survey any time you want.   There are no known risks associated with participation in the study. Benefits:  It is hoped that your insight into the topic of my research will help me in my understanding of this issue and will help me succeed in my English course. Cost Compensation: Participation in this study will involve no costs or payments to you. Confidentiality: All information collected during the study period will be kept strictly confidential and will be destroyed after the project is completed. No publications or reports from this project will include identifying information on any participant without your signed permission, and after your review of the materials.  By continuing to the study, you agree to the above conditions. Thank you for your time. What is your gender?

Female



Male



Other



#### \*2. How old are you?

0 - 17



18 - 24



25 -44



45 - 64



65+



#### \*3. Where are you from?(City, state, nation if not USA)



#### \*4. How would you rate your ability to critically analyze the meaning of images?

|  | excellent | very good | good | bad | terrible |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| your ability | your ability  excellent | your ability  very good | your ability  good | your ability  bad | your ability  terrible |

#### \*5. In your opinion what is the image below trying to say?Image A



#### \*6. How does the image of this lake make you feel?http://i.imgur.com/O3XOUZU.jpg



#### \*7. What emotions/topics come to mind after viewing the following image?http://www.njhopeline.com/images/suicide.jpg



#### \*8. Do the image above and the image below discuss similar situations? Explain.https://sujenman.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/bearsuicide.jpg



#### \*9. How important do you think it is that people can understand/interpret visual meanings?

|  | very important |  | moderately important |  | not important |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How important | How important very important | How important | How important moderately important | How important | How important not important |

#### \*10. People say that a picture is worth a thousand words. Do you agree or disagree with this statement, and why?

